

Yet, his entire career is a tribute to the power of great ideas.

President Reagan believed deeply in American character and destiny. He believed deeply in the power of freedom to improve the lives of average men and women. These ideas changed America, and they changed the world, not only because he eloquently explained them, because they are right and they are true. Ronald Reagan believed that prosperity is another—another name for economic freedom, and his policies of freedom laid the foundations for a prosperous and for a generous society.

Ronald Reagan believed that history is on the side of human liberty, that all tyranny must be temporary, because liberty is the universal hope of all mankind. He believed that the aspirations of our country require the might of our military. And he knew that the cause of freedom is served by moral clarity, a willingness to call oppression and evil by their proper names.

Above all, Ronald Reagan believed in the strong character of the American people, even when some on both the left and right were quite skeptical of that character. He would recognize the country we have seen since September the 11th. He would look at the spirit and sacrifice of the firefighters and police officers, the men and women of our military, average Americans, and he'd be proud. He wouldn't be surprised. He knew the courage and decency and generosity at the heart of this country because he shared it and he embodied it.

At every step of an amazing life, Nancy Reagan has been at Ronald Reagan's side—right by his side. As his optimism inspired us, her love and devotion strengthened him. As first lady of California, Mrs. Reagan spoke out on behalf of POWs and American servicemen missing in action. As our First Lady of the United States, Nancy Reagan led an antidrug campaign that helped significantly reduce teen drug use. Now she has joined the fight against the terrible curse of Alzheimer's.

Ronald and Nancy Reagan were married in 1952, and their love for one another has only grown greater with the passage of time. They set out to make a life together, and this amazing partnership helped change the

world. Now on a difficult journey, we admire Nancy Reagan's eloquent example of loyalty and love.

May God bless you and your husband, Mrs. Reagan. And may God bless this country he loves so much.

And now I'm honored to present the Gold Medal, along with the Speaker and Senator Byrd, President pro tempore.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:50 p.m. in the Rotunda at the Capitol. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of former First Lady Nancy Reagan.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Welfare Reform Legislation

May 16, 2002

Today the House passed welfare reform legislation that will help millions of Americans realize a life of hope, dignity, and independence. This compassionate approach builds upon our past successes by moving more Americans from welfare to work, encouraging strong families and healthy marriages, and freeing States to innovate as they help people find the independence of a job.

I commend the House for moving quickly and now urge the Senate to act on behalf of those who seek a better life.

Statement on Completion of the NATO Mission in the United States

May 16, 2002

I thank NATO for the steadfast support and cooperation after the attacks on September 11. Today marks the end of NATO aircraft and crews patrolling American skies as part of Operation Noble Eagle. These aircrews began their deployment soon after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. This deployment, coupled with the declaration that the attacks on the United States were attacks on all NATO members, affirmed NATO's commitment to collective defense.

For 220 days, NATO aircrews from 12 nations, based at Tinker AFB in Oklahoma, flew missions over the United States. On behalf of the American people, I thank them